

Palms in the Farquhar Collection of Natural History Drawings

Lim Chong Keat

Heritage Research Sdn Bhd
215 Macalister Road, 10450 Penang, Malaysia

Over the period of his stay in Malacca from 1795 to 1818, Major-General William Farquhar accumulated an extensive collection of drawings of flora and fauna which he presented to the Royal Asiatic Society in 1827. It was sold in auction at Sotheby's in 1994 by the Society, and was subsequently acquired and magnanimously donated in 1996 to the Singapore Heritage Museum where the drawings have been given appropriate pride of place. The works by local artists - said to be Chinese - were not the only items collected or kept by Farquhar; there were others sent by him to Marquis Wellesley, then Governor-General of India from 1798-1805. The Wellesley Collection might indeed have offered interesting comparisons. It consisted of 2660 folios of natural history subjects, including 15 volumes on plants, kept at the India Office Library in London. Other East India Company botanical drawings have been deposited at Kew.

From my initial scan of the material pertaining to flora, viewing the marvellous Raffles items and others within the India Office Library, there appear to be no duplicates or similar drawings. Indeed, there were no records there pertaining to Farquhar as a collector of natural history drawings. There are believed to be other items in private ownership from the same artists and vintage; some of the Farquhar ones have watermarks dated 1796. At the Kew Library, I eventually came across two palm drawings which were exact and undoubtedly contemporaneous copies, within the collection of George Findlayson, who had accompanied Crawford to Siam in 1821-1822, and was likely to have had access to the same artists in Malaya. It can thus be conjectured that Farquhar's items were not necessarily exclusive, and that the Chinese artists had a wider clientele; indeed they would have been practising their trade for quite some time, catering for European interest in exotic natural history and other subjects.

In China, John Reeves had begun to commission local painters since 1812, and he amassed a collection of some 2000 items now at the British Natural History Museum. He had supplied the Horticultural Society of London with drawings by artists whose names have been recorded as "Akut, Akam, Akew and Asung". The employment of artists from Canton and Macao went back even earlier; J. Cunningham probably used them for the 800 drawings he sent home between 1698-1703. British interest in botany and the commercial potential of Asian plants had been concomitant with the activities of the East India Company since 1698, in common with the Dutch whose botanists since Rumphius had also been energetic in the region, followed by Blume. Joseph Banks and Daniel Carl

Solander made extensive collections during the Cook voyages.

In India, the work of Roxburgh, Hunter, Wallich, and Jack laid the foundation for others such as Griffith; within the first half of the 19th century they provided the earliest taxonomic coverage of the flora of Penang and Malacca. Indeed Farquhar showed the collection of drawings to Dr. William Jack (who accompanied Raffles to Penang) in 1818, who was rather critical about their botanical adequacy. It is more than likely that Jack would have been familiar with the excellent and meticulous herbarium drawings being amassed by Roxburgh at the Calcutta Botanic Gardens in India, including the superb watercolours commissioned by William Hunter in 1802 to represent the flora of Prince of Wales's Island, which gave an indication of the high quality expected in botanical illustration. Indian artists were employed in the main for botanical and zoological renderings, but it is thought that the Hunter items were by Chinese, probably in Penang. The botanists and amateurs of the day would have supervised the illustrations, and often supplied the paper stock and the specimens; they were often already acquainted with the scientific names given to plant names by Linnaeus and others.

The Farquhar collection is nevertheless important and significant historically, and includes many items in the region then not yet scientifically recorded; some collected and represented from Mount Ophir are believed to be the original holotypes. There are indeed many illustrations that are artistically charming and botanically informative - although some are naive and not quite accurate. They nevertheless provide interesting challenges for the identification of the species observed and recorded, and also for unravelling their actual location and extance. With regard to flora it might appear that the items were not all from Malacca or from Mount Ophir - or from the Malay Peninsula - as the drawing of the Double Coconut of the Seychelles would infer. This and the other eleven palm items were not included in the two bound volumes then owned by the Royal Asiatic Society which were perused by I.H. Burkill and described by him in his articles in the *Gardens' Bulletin* (Vol.XII,1949:404-407; Vol.XIV,1955:530-533). Much of the flora had remained unidentified until then, but some of his determinations are due for correction and updating, and have stimulated this paper - which will be confined mainly to the palm taxa, sixteen within the two volumes, and a total of 28 in the whole collection.

The 472 drawings were catalogued in 1991 within the total collection of the Royal Asiatic Society by the indefatigable Raymond Head, who recorded that the Farquhar items were by then no longer in their original bound volumes. He provided an index for the set, numbered 016.001-016.472, and deciphered their inscriptions as best he could, unfortunately without the help of botanists or zoologists - or someone familiar with Jawi or Romanised Malay. There are therefore consequential misrenderings that need to be corrected; for example: item 016.469 is listed as "*Caryota wiens*", which is clearly *Caryota mitis*. There are indeed scribbles difficult to make out, and Jawi does lend itself to various transliterations, calling for familiarity with the local names of the locality and vintage.



Plate 1 *Pinanga malaiana*: "Wild Betel Nut"; (RAS:016.048).

In the first volume (016.001-016.054 in Head) inscribed “Medicinal plants, etc., of Malacca” on the flyleaf, apparently in Farquhar’s hand, Burkill noted 55 items, of which only one was a palm (No. 49; 016.048 in Head), which he identified not incorrectly as a *Pinanga* sp. That drawing carried the inscriptions in English “Wild Betel Nut”, and in Jawi “Pinang Utan”; (there was also an irrelevant superscription “Calamus Ketang” by pen, and a pencil note: “Rotang”, on the sheet). It becomes part of the sleuthing exercise to figure out the dates of the annotations, in English and in Jawi - as to which were original - and their authority; Burkill suggests that Linley had contributed a note probably in London, and it is not unlikely that Jack might also have added notes. Local names in Jawi, and the Rumi transliterations have provided an important basis for botanical identification; they certainly guided Burkill’s taxonomic determinations. None of the palm species included in the two volumes had been named by 1827, but some of the other twelve elsewhere in the Farquhar collection already had established scientific names, some attributed to Linnaeus, and were so inscribed, and these will be mentioned later. It is open to conjecture if Farquhar was himself versed in these names, and would have been responsible for the titles. Although he employed artists who were Chinese, according to Wallich, the Jawi vernacular names for distinctive local flora were obviously by Malay scribes of the vintage and literacy of Munshi Abdullah. Many items in the vast Indian natural history collections also had Jawi superscriptions.

In Burkill’s notes on the first bound volume and with reference to the “Wild Betel Nut”, it is surprising that he did not offer the obvious determination as the ubiquitous *Pinanga malaiana* (Mart.) Scheff., published in 1838 (see Plate 1), which has been collected both in Penang and Malacca (and elsewhere throughout the Peninsula and in Sumatra), and well represented in the Singapore Herbarium. He had however 54 other non-palm items to deal with.

In the second book (016.055-016.096 in Head), which had originally been bound in a volume measuring 37 x 42 cm, inscribed “Drawings of Plants from Malacca Presented by Col. Farquhar Vol. 2”, there are 42 drawings. Burkill notes that items 17 to 21 were from Mount Ophir. It is not known where the first sixteen items came from; they were all labelled rattans in Jawi, but as Burkill observed, item 16(016.070), “rotan sega” is not a rattan or at all a palm but is *Flagellaria indica* Linn., and that the term “rotan dini” is sometimes applied to this type of plant. Apart from item 14 the others are indeed rattans likely to have been found in the Malacca area, but not exclusively so. The only inscriptions on the pictures are in Jawi. Drawing from more recent taxonomic information, notably by John Dransfield (“A Manual of the Rattans of the Malay Peninsula”), an update on Burkill’s identifications is presented herewith, *with corrections in italics*:-

- 1 (016.055). “Rotan perachit” : *Daemonorops angustifolia* (Griff.) Mart. (1850); now known as rotan getah.
- 2 (016.056). “Rotan batu” : *Calamus insignis* var. *insignis* Griff. (1844); the local name is still used.



Plate 2 *Calamus speciosissimus*:
 “Rotan sega badak”: (RAS: 016.058).



Plate 3 *Myrialepis paradoxa*: “Rotan kertang”:
 (RAS: 016.059).



Plate 4 *Korthalsia rostrata*: “Rotan semut”:
 (RAS: 016.060).

- 3 (016.057). "Rotan jerenang" : *Daemonorops propinqua* Becc.in J.D.Hooker (1893); the local name is also used for three other rattan taxa.
- 4 (016.058). "Rotan sega badak" : *Calamus speciosissimus* Furt. (1956) (see Plate 2).
- 5 (016.059). "Rotan kertang" : *Myrialepis paradoxa* (Kurz) J. Drans. (synon: *M. scortechinii* Becc. 1893); the local name also spelt "kertong" (see Plate 3).
- 6 (016.060). "Rotan semut" : *Korthalsia rostrata* Bl. (synon: *K. scaphigera* Griff. ex Mart. 1849); the local name applies also to other species of *Korthalsia*, as noted by Burkill (see Plate 3).
- 7 (016.061). "Rotan tunggul" : *Plectocomiopsis geminiflora* (Griff.) Becc. 1893; currently called rotan rilang; rotan tunngal is *Calamus laevigatus*.
- 8 (016.062). "Rotan manau" : *Plectocomia elongata* Mart. ex Bl. (synon: *P. griffithii* Becc. 1893); usually called rotan mantang; rotan manau is *Calamus manan*.
- 9 (016.063). "Rotan kemandong" : *Calamus* sp., probably *C. speciosissimus*, see item 4; the local name is not known currently.
- 10 (016.064). "Rotan dahanan" : *Korthalsia rigida* Bl. (1843); rotan dahan also applies to other species of *Korthalsia*, sometimes also called rotan semut.
- 11 (016.065). "Rotan semambu" : not identifiable from the drawing; probably *Calamus scipionum* Lour. 1790, to which the local name refers.
- 12 (016.066). "Rotan sisir" : not identifiable from the drawing; "*Calamus griffithianus* Mart." as mentioned by Burkill is not known in current checklists; the local name is also not known, and could have been applied to any finely pinnated taxon e.g. *Calamus exilis* Griff..
- 13 (016.067). "Rotan gelam" : not identifiable from the drawing; not *Daemonorops verticillaris* (Griff.) Mart.
- 14 (016.068). to be discussed below.
- 15 (016.069). "Rotan getah" : a *Daemonorops* sp., probably *D. angustifolia*, from the local name.

Item 14 is labelled "Rotan pinang-pinang", but it is obviously not a rattan, and Burkill suggests that its stem would have been used as a walking-stick or 'rotan' cane. He misidentifies it as *Pinanga disticha* Bl., which is quite surprising as that taxon is easily recognisable by leaf and inflorescence and is again well represented in herbarium collections. It is in fact not a *Pinanga* but rather an *Iguanura* sp. (see Plate 5); the genus was only described in 1838 by Blume based on a Sumatran type specimen. This particular species with pinnate trapezoidal leaflets has quite positively not been found in Malacca, or south of Perak - or on Penang Island, another well-known botanical collection site. Thus unless it proves



Plate 5 *Iguanura* sp.: "Rotan pinang-pinang"; (RAS: 016.068).

to be an utterly extinct or undiscovered species, it suggests that Farquhar's artist had access to collections from areas beyond the British settlements. From recent field research a new species of single-stemmed *Iguanura* from the Belum area (also found in Gunung Bubu, and Bujang Melaka) has similar features.

There are twelve other palm drawings which are not part of the two volumes described by Burkill; their place in the Farquhar collection can be traced from the Head index number (shown in brackets). They were apparently bound in two albums, each with 77 items, and similarly inscribed "Drawings of Plants from Malacca", although we are quite certain that not all the plants hail from Malacca. Six of the palm with known botanical names were annotated accordingly: "Coco Nut Tree: *Cocos nucifera*" (016.441), "Pinang Betle Nut Tree - Beetle Tree: *Areca catechu*" (016.446), "Buah Lontar - Palmyra : *Borassus flabelliformis* (Lin.)" - correctly *B. flabellifer* L., synonym: *B. flabelliformis* J.A.Murray (016.447), "Tookas: *Caryota mitis*" (016.469), "Nipah: *Nipa fruticans*" (016.422), and "Corma -Dabe, *Elate sylvestris*" - which was the Linnaeus name, now *Phoenix sylvestris* (L.) Roxb. (probably 016.443, listed uninscribed), the last-mentioned being a species then already introduced to Malacca. The first four items had no Jawi inscriptions - suggesting that their naming required no local assistance, whereas the *Caryota* had a faintly pencilled Jawi corroborative note, and also the Nipah, which was annotated within the picture as "Pokok Nipah". Another charming drawing is of "Sago": *Metroxylon sagu* Rottl. (016.470), which had no Jawi but indecipherable English annotations. There is another labelled only in Jawi with no Rumi transliteration : a naive but elegant rendering of *Arenga pinnata* (Wurmb) Merr. (016.452, uninscribed), yet another introduced species, also commonly found in kampongs. This is one of the two duplicated in Findlayson's collection, which is labelled "*Arenga saccherifera* Bl."

Two further drawings are of "Poko Nibong" : *Oncosperma tigillarium* (Jack) Ridl. (016.433), "Sala - The Sala(?) Fruit": *Salacca sp.* (016.454) (see Plate 6). The items mentioned so far were from the album dated c.1805-1818, but there is yet another interesting palm within the other earlier album, the "Palas batoo": *Licuala longipes* Griff. (016.346) (see Plate 7), with inconspicuous Jawi notes. This is indeed a taxon common in Malacca and on Mount Ophir, where it was later described by Griffith in 1845.

The final palm to be discussed is from the album containing ten others mentioned above. It is that famous endemic of the Seychelles - the Coco-de-Mer, *Lodoicea maldivica* (Gmel.) Pers. (016.434) (see Plate 8). The drawing bears a pencilled inscription "*Lodoicea Sechellarum*", a name geographically correct, unfortunately rendered invalid by taxonomic precedence. It would have seemed most unlikely that there would have been fully grown specimens in Malacca at that time, and that Farquhar's artists have drawn it at other locations or even from illustrations, as it would have been a noted exotic from the sea route to India and Malaya. A copy of the same drawing is also in the Findlayson collection at Kew, and it is therefore not unique as evidence of flora from a particular locality. The mystery dispelled by Burkill (1935) citing an amazing record by Koenig (see JRAS



Plate 6 *Salacca* sp.:
 "Sala - The Sala (?) Fruit": (RAS: 016.454).



Plate 7 *Licuala longipes*: "Palas batoo":
 (RAS: 016.346).



Plate 8 *Lodoicea maldivica*:
 "Lodoicea Sechellarum": (RAS: 016.434).

Str. Br. 26, 1894: 104) that a three-year old palm had been seen growing in the garden of a rich man, Bartolomei de Vents by name, in 1778; this indeed gives us positive evidence that the Farquhar drawing if made c.1818 of the same palm, would have been 43 years old, and thus quite fecund - also implying that suitable floristic mates or progeny were also growing nearby.

Farquhar's collection is certainly amply fascinating even from viewing a narrow botanical sector such as palms; the total rich trove of the other natural history illustrations will undoubtedly yield a wealth of early perceptions in the depiction of Malesian flora and fauna at the commencement of the 19th century.

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